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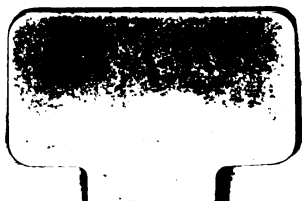
ÆONE

OR

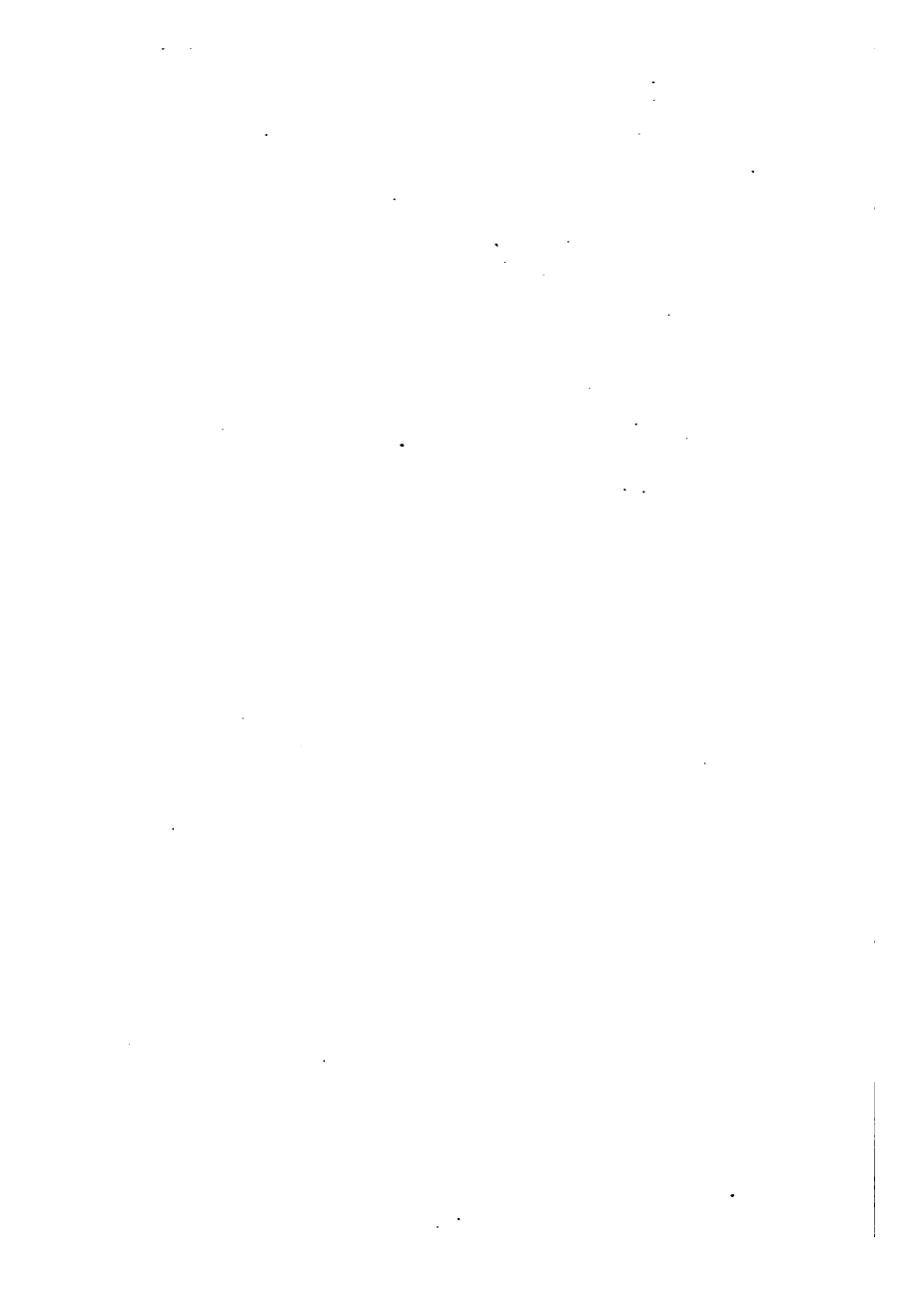
*Before the Dawn.*



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1. The first part of the document is a list of names and titles.



# ŒONE;

OR,

## Before the Dawn.



καὶ νῦν αἱ πάσχω πλῆθειον παρὼν ἱερᾶ.

—— σὺ δ' ἀσπερὶς αὐτὰς ἦν οὐκ εἰσορᾷς.

*16.12.13*

EDINBURGH:  
ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK.

MDCCCLXIII.

*280. C. 215.*



LONDON:  
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## PREFACE.

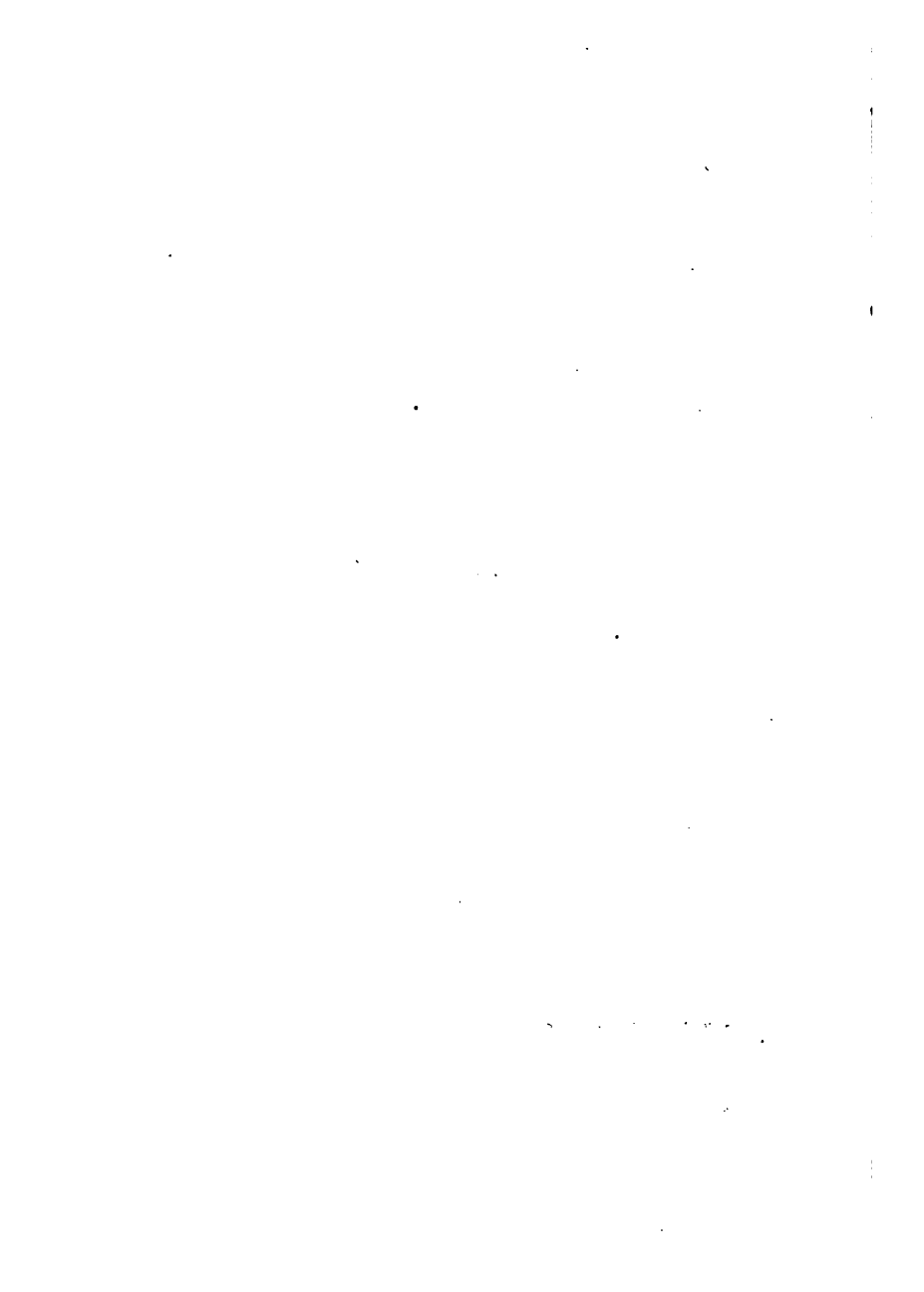
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DURING a temporary residence some years since in a great Continental capital, the Author became acquainted with a nobleman who traced his Eastern and princely lineage beyond the boundaries of historical record, through the dim vista of legendary lore, into the shadowy regions where even the myth gradually fades from sight.

Amidst graphic descriptions, connecting his family proudly with important epochs in the chronicles of the world, he was once asked for an explanation of his coat-of-arms, and especially of its most conspicuous device—representing in rude outline a female form standing upon a globe, holding the emblems of priestly office, and sur-

rounded by attendant sun, moon, and stars. He replied that it commemorated a royal priestess of his house, who existed centuries before the Christian era, renowned alike for superhuman beauty and for wisdom excelling that of all the sages of her time. During her life, as well as after death, she was held in almost divine reverence. Although born amidst the deep darkness of Paganism, she was said to have arrived at a knowledge of the One Supreme God, and a conviction of man's pure spiritual existence beyond the grave. This legend, related with the simple eloquence of genuine faith, appeared to offer a foundation for a tale such as the Writer has here feebly attempted to weave into verse.

ONE.



ÆONE ;

OR,

Before the Dawn.

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ÆONE! — Dare a feeble voice reclaim  
From shrouded mystery thy sacred name?  
Æone! Lamp of Light supremely blest,  
Thou Pearl of Truth, of magic power possesst;  
Priestess! enhaloed with celestial fire;  
Prophet! awaking an immortal lyre,  
Doth glory veil thee from our earthly sight,  
Or Death enchain thee in eternal night?

No fairer branch e'er graced a royal stem,  
Nor form of lovelier mould wore diadem;

The great Acastes on his daughter's face  
Was wont the reflex of that god to trace,  
From whom he sprang by taintless, proud descent—  
His love and cherished hopes in her were blent.  
Well might all hearts adore her ! heavenly light  
Beamed from her face, yet dazzled not the sight ;  
She came like visitant from some far land  
Where truth and love in unity expand ;  
Or strain celestial breathing from a sphere  
Known ere the spirit was imprisoned here.  
But what may words avail ? she was a thought  
The soul had dimly longed for, vainly sought ;  
A light to kindle in each heart a fire  
To purify from every low desire ;  
A glory, resting but a moment here ;  
A wandering star, still searching for a sphere.  
Such was she ! what she has become, my tale  
May scarce unfold ; but sometimes when the veil  
Of night falls softly o'er the world's repose,  
And restless, lonely, haunted by my woes,  
I upwards gaze, and murmur to the sky,  
Some gentle star seems whispering to reply ;

And soothed, I think that heaven-sent ray of love  
 Once wandering here, now fixed, gives light above.

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*

Her wisdom, beauty, grace, and noble name  
 Were known where'er could reach the breath of fame.  
 But what, thou ask'st, so suddenly befell  
 All hands to bind, all hearts to chill and quell,  
 Whilst she, that loved one, passed and was no more,  
 Cast ruthlessly on dark Oblivion's shore ?  
 Thenceforth even whisper of her name forbid,  
 As though some deadly shame must thus be hid.  
 Alas ! rehearsing that most direful tale  
 The throbbing heart, the quivering lip must fail—  
 There may be wounds no time nor art can heal  
 Within the breast unscarred by edge of steel.

Here is it law, as thou perchance hast known,  
 That every daughter of Oasia's throne  
 As priestess at the temple's shrine should serve,  
 And evermore her country's faith preserve.  
 There, still an infant, reckoning life by days,  
 Unconscious all alike of prayer or praise,

The young Æone, borne in regal state,  
By bonds invisible was linked to fate.

I see her still with reverential awe  
Approach the hallowed shrine, the veil withdraw ;  
Her childish form more beautiful and bright  
Than even the goddess thus disclosed to sight ;  
I hear her silvery voice in sacred praise ;  
I see her kneel with rapt prophetic gaze,  
As though even then some strange, unconscious thought,  
Presage of doom, in her young bosom wrought.

Eight times had fruitful seasons blessed the earth  
Since joyous thousands hailed Æone's birth,  
When broke without a cloud one fateful morn,  
To close in horror, though in sunshine born.  
The hour of prayer was past, but still the veil  
Remained withdrawn ; while some within the pale,  
Absorbed in supplication such as flows  
From souls conflicting with life's cruel woes,  
Hear not deep groanings from the earth oppress,  
Nor thunder muttering in voice suppress,

Until one mighty peal, one echoing wail  
Fraught with dire woe reverberates through the vale,  
Internal fires convulsive rend the earth,  
And all creation travails as in birth ;  
Then, panic-stricken, faith—prayer—gods as nought,  
All fly the shrine, which trustful they had sought.  
Sudden, amidst the elemental clash,  
Revealed through darkness by the lightning's flash,  
A form appears nor heaven nor earth appalls,  
An anguished voice "Eone !" shrieking calls.  
Onwards, through crumbling walls and prostrate domes,  
To reach the sacred temple swiftly comes  
The mother !—She amidst confusion wild  
Sees but earth yawning to engulf—her child.  
On, ever on, the temple gates are past,  
Around one rapid, searching gaze she cast ;  
With failing step she nears the hallowed shrine :  
Oh, who the mother's heart may now divine ?  
As kneeling at the altar reached in dread,  
She finds the child her fears had imaged dead.  
No terror there revealed, that infant mien  
Shows the rapt soul scarce conscious of the scene :

Upwards and fixt she on the goddess turns  
 Those eyes where holy fire still quenchless burns ;  
 Never did fancy fairer vision draw  
 Than that young spirit, tranquil in its awe.  
 " Æone ! loved one, haste—hence let us fly !"  
 " Fly from the sacred temple mother ? why ?  
 Wherefore beloved mother flee the shrine,  
 Are we not guarded by a power divine ?"  
 Astræa answered not, as to her breast,  
 O'ercharged with joy and dread, the child was prest ;  
 But scarcely to the gates the way half won  
 When, with a shock as of the earth o'erthrown,  
 A crash of rending skies, a sweeping blast,  
 As though all winds were rushing wildly past—  
 Swift through the temple flashed a bolt of fire,  
 And then, as if the heavens had spent their ire,  
 All fell to stillness, awful as the strife—  
 Like death's triumphant victory over life.

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At length upon the stifling darkness stole  
 A sullen light ; that, deepening o'er the whole,

Pervaded the dumb air until o'erhead  
The murky pall Destruction's hand had spread,  
Now torn and shrunk, through all its yawning rents  
Disclosed th'empyrean, rife with such portents  
That hoary seers in anguish turned aside,  
Veiling their faces, while they hoarsely cried,  
That omens ne'er before from augury drawn  
Were charactered in that appalling dawn.  
It seemed as if in that brief, dreadful night  
The skies had fallen to chaos. Lurid light  
In distance showed huge, shapeless masses hurled  
Like glowing fragments of a ruined world ;  
Whilst slowly, through the red ethereal arch,  
Advanced in threatening and majestic march,  
Rank over rank, gigantic fiery forms,  
The flame-clad rearguard of the cloud-winged storms ;  
No spot revealed the glorious vault of blue ;  
Earth, sea, and air shed one volcanic hue,  
Until—outworn the elemental strife  
Where death and chaos warred with worlds and life—  
Emerging high above the crimsoned flood  
The God of Day glared fiercely—red as blood.

Touched by th' assuring beams of brilliant noon,  
 Asträa, waking from her deathlike swoon,  
 With eager start and questioning unrest  
 Gazed on the child clasped closely to her breast.  
 One radiant smile, a tender, glad caress,  
 Said all. She paused but to give thanks and bless ;  
 Then rising, onward swiftly would have sped.—  
*One* lived : but who might else be of the dead ?  
 “ A moment, mother, stay ; the duty mine,  
 Till now forgot, to veil the sacred shrine.”  
 Scarce had she turned, when through the temple rang,  
 A shriek as from the heart's last deadly pang :  
 With starting eyeballs, arms outstretched, transfixed,  
 An image of despair and horror mixed,  
 One stood ; then shivered, gasped, and fell,  
 As though the last dread peal had been her knell.

Well had it been if from the heavy trance  
 Following that one appalling, fateful glance,  
 Her infant soul had never more awaked  
 To know the torment of a thirst unslaked :

Still better, mingling mercy with its ire,  
The heavens had twofold charged that bolt of fire—  
Their wrath at once on child and goddess spent,  
In one terrific doom their ashes blent.

Not now may pause my visionary gaze  
Upon remembrance of the dread amaze  
Which filled all living hearts, when from the sky  
Light o'er a ruined world smiled mockingly ;  
What cries resounding through the sun-lit air  
Told tales of desolation and despair,  
Of loves, of joys, of hopes for ever fled ;  
No other sounds proved life amidst the dead.

Long did Asträa and Acastes keep  
Their watch of sorrow o'er Æone's sleep :  
Long it appeared as though no spark remained  
Of that young spirit earth had never stained ;  
At length a sigh, convulsive and profound,  
Startled the almost hopeless hearts around ;  
Those eyes, a mystery, though full of light,  
Unclosed, no more around to shed delight :

Passive, upon her mother's breast she hung,  
The heart still spoke, though mind and frame unstrung.  
No word fell from her lips, but oft she prest  
Her little hands upon her heaving breast ;  
Oft shudderingly her gentle eyes would close,  
As though to scare them fearful visions rose ;  
Thus lay she, suffering, uncomplaining, still,  
A sight each heart with piteous grief to fill,  
That aught so young, so tender, erst so bright,  
Should trembling turn away and shun the light.

At length, one morn, Eone calmly slept,  
Her mother fondly o'er her watched, and wept  
Tears more of joy than sorrow, for at last  
It seemed the flower might yet survive the blast.  
Waking, no longer feverish unrest  
Marked consciousness returning in her breast.

" Mother ! " at last she said, " there came a dream ;  
Reality could not more fearful seem :  
No darkness veiled it from my shuddering sight,  
It fled not in the glare of noontday light.

Methought, while watching at the goddess' shrine,  
I kneeling prayed, and marked her smile divine ;  
When, suddenly, a strange, terrific sound  
Struck on mine ear ; beneath my limbs the ground  
Heaved like the billows of an angry sea ;  
Each pillar trembling like a storm-rocked tree ;  
The worshippers, affrighted, shrieking fled ;  
The priests (but 'twas a dream, O mother,) sped  
With hurrying footsteps, terror-stricken forth,  
Whilst darkness gathered o'er the groaning earth ;  
Yet amidst thickening gloom and lightning glare,  
Re-echoing thunder, cries of wild despair,  
The goddess ever smiled. I knew no fear ;  
Then, too, thy voice was heard approaching near ;  
Thine arms encircled me ; we would have past  
Swift to the temple gates, when lo ! a blast  
Burst over-head as though the skies were rent ;  
Whilst through the columned space in fierce descent,  
There flashed a ball of fire. No more I knew  
Until awaking, painful breath I drew ;  
Darkness still brooded : on the ground I lay,  
Pressed close within thine arms, until a ray

Of glowing light I saw smile o'er thy face,  
Its path through arch and column next could trace :  
Oh, it was beautiful to see the light  
Glide through the darkness of that dreadful night !  
Then, mother, thou didst wake ; and to the shrine  
I would have turned to veil the form divine,  
When, lo ! a sight of horror met mine eye,  
More dread than yawning earth or rending sky.  
Canst thou believe ?—the holy goddess lay  
Shattered to fragments like a thing of clay !  
Oh, mother, never from my stricken sight  
That dream had passed, but as I slept to-night  
Methought when at the shrine I stood again,  
Each effort to withdraw the veil was vain ;  
Thick, black, it stood, an adamantine wall,  
As held beneath enchantment's mighty thrall :  
No spot revealed the goddess to my view,  
All vainly were my prayers poured forth anew,  
When slowly, though I scarce could trust my sense,  
There spread a light so glowing and intense,  
The veil—no more a heavy, solid cloud—  
Transparent shone, like glory round a god.

My eyes, all dazzled, closed ; and to the ground  
 I laid my face, and listened—for a sound  
 More sweet than e'en thy voice, my mother, came ;  
 Low, soft, and clear, I heard it breathe my name :  
 ' O one ! chosen favourite of heaven,  
 Fear not, though earth and sky be tempest-riven :  
 The storm-rent cliff with grandeur marks the height ;  
 The darkest cloud oft melts in gorgeous light ;  
 The devastating torrent's mountain wake  
 Leads to the valley's heaven-reflecting lake ;  
 The dying seed strikes forth the living root ;  
 The blossom perishing gives birth to fruit ;  
 Thus is the law proclaimed of sovereign Will,  
 That good shall triumph, howe'er germed in ill.  
 Priestess, observe, and learn ; in patience wait ;  
 Trust, hope, and falter not ! Fulfil thy fate !'  
 Awhile I prostrate lay, nor dared to raise  
 Again, although I longed, my dazzled gaze.  
 At length, desiring, trembling to behold,  
 I looked ; 'twas gone—the glowing cloud of gold.  
 In vain I sought around one lingering ray,  
 As cradled soft, mid fragrant flowers I lay.

Above me stretched the heavens—their starry eyes  
Never had looked so tender and so wise ;  
The breeze so mild, it scarcely fanned my cheek,  
And yet it spoke—all seemed to me to speak  
In wordless echoes of that thrilling tone,  
Of glory breathing from the shrouded throne.  
My mother, now I know it was but dreamed—  
That blighting vision which so real seemed.  
The goddess lives ! her voice I heard this night,  
Though glory veiled her from my yearning sight.”

Silent Asträa heard : with trembling dread  
Saw hope reviving of delusion bred ;  
Yet feared, where life and hope were but the same,  
To breathe a chill upon the kindling flame.  
Silent she watched ; and marked how from that day  
Peace o’er the youthful soul resumed its sway ;  
Freed from the crush of all untimely woe  
The spirits gushed in childhood’s buoyant flow,  
Till, health restored, with light elastic tread,  
And face with purest radiance overspread,

One sought once more the sacred spot,  
 All but its hallowed memories forgot ;  
 In eager haste, by reverence subdued,  
 Priestess again before the shrine she stood ;  
 Trembling, withdrew the veil,—when, lo ! appeared  
 Another image than that long revered ;  
 A form was there, more beautiful by far  
 Than what so long had been her guiding star ;  
 Art had arrested on that marble face  
 Celestial beauty, majesty, and grace,  
 But not the idol this within her heart,  
 Twined with her soul, of which it seemed a part.  
 She knew it not—'twas but alike in name,  
 In symbolled meaning like—but not the same.  
 Clasp ing her hands, in agony supreme,  
 One murmured, shuddering, “ ’Twas no dream ! ”

\* \* \* \* \*

That youthful priestess never more was known  
 Heart-prayer to offer at the stranger throne ;  
 Nor seen to listen, rapt, in reverence kneeling,  
 As if around were spirit-music stealing.

Long would she gaze with strange, perplexèd mien,  
As though her thoughts were straying from the scene ;  
With eye, once calm in its mysterious light,  
Now feverishly uncertain, burning bright ;  
Now fixt, as if it fain a void would fill ;  
Then wandering aimless, hopeless, restless still.  
Yet, while her outward service was performed,  
But one there was who marked the change alarmed.  
Astræa saw a part, and guessed the whole,  
The mother waked the prophet in her soul :  
Trembling with half-formed presages of ill,  
Her heart grew daily weaker and more chill ;  
Still closing round her, pressed a thickening gloom,  
Foreshadowing from afar the coming doom ;  
The atmosphere, so light for others' breath,  
To her was heavy as with damps of death.

Thus passed away those first and fairest years  
Wherein hopes bud, bright-hued, untouched by fears ;  
When youth the name of grief may scarcely know,  
Æone's brow was marked by hidden woe ;

By all the misery of faith destroyed—  
 The aching pain of search—amidst a void.  
 Then, like a smile of pity, softly came  
 A sister babe, her heart to wake and claim;  
 Love-kindled, hope once more resuming sway,  
 Her spirit paused upon its toilsome way;  
 No more through vacancy her wandering glance  
 Searched vainly; nor, half sunk in torpid trance,  
 Upon the world she gazed in dreary pain;  
 The Real claimed her—and she lived again.

Thenceforth, with all the ardour of her youth,  
 She sought the springs of wisdom and of truth;  
 Sages soon listened, reverent, while she spoke;  
 And gods, they thought, must hear should she invoke.  
 Eternal Truth! if e'er there come a time  
 When all, adoring, own thy power sublime,—  
 When light—no more a solitary spark  
 That dies, scarce kindled, mid surrounding dark—  
 Pure, all-pervading, Earth shall fill as Heaven,  
 And sins of blindness be at length forgiven,

Then may be washed away the hideous stain  
 From those who dealt with *her* as thing profane.

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*

Æone sought ; to her 'twas given to find  
 Sources unknown to many a sage's mind ;  
 For then, as now, few marked or understood  
 How truth rewards, through nature loved and wooed :  
 The distant and mysterious, undefined,  
 Too oft with treacherous hues attracts the mind,  
 Whilst purest beauty, changeless and serene,—  
 Like priceless gem, unheeded or unseen—  
 Oft close upon our very path may lie,  
 No less than clothed in far-off mystery,  
 Yet still remain unmarked, unsought, withstood,—  
 Or worse—disdained—because a common good.  
 Not thus Æone ; heart-discernment rare  
 Taught her to prize as blest what all may share ;  
 Her powerful mind, escaping from the spell,  
 No more mid shadows or a void could dwell,  
 False lights could not mislead, nor hues allure,  
 She sought the changeless—thirsted for the pure.

Many there be who wonder why that form,  
At dawn and eve, in sunshine and in storm,  
Now fleet ascends the mountain's dizzy steep,  
Whilst rushing winds o'er clouds and waters sweep ;  
And now, reclining on some mossy knoll,  
Reads in the flowers and leaves as in a scroll,  
Watches the gay-winged insect in the air—  
Marks, crawling still, one yet to be as fair,  
Harkens to songsters warbling mid the trees,  
Lists to each whisper of the rustling breeze,  
As if such language, falling on her ear,  
Were tone-familiar from the voice most dear.

Through all I watched and worshipped, for I knew  
That knowledge thus in her to wisdom grew ;  
Knew her exalted, of a faith divine  
To be the pure and fitting mortal shrine ;  
And deemed that love and reverence must impel  
All hearts to bow before her sovereign spell.  
O one ! gracious being ! of the soul  
Celestial lodestar to an unseen goal,

I loved thee as the blind restored loves sight,  
 Or the freed captive worships air and light;  
 Glorious thou wert ! with brow of lofty thought,  
 Eyes which the Infinite, reflected, caught ;  
 In majesty of mien, transcending grace,  
 Scarce seeming on the earth to have a place ;  
 Yet never cold, as though in marble cast,  
 Tender and loving—woman to the last.

Thou sayest well :—for every common ill  
 Nature benignly medicine granteth still ;  
 That gracious Time abounds with gentle art  
 To soothe, if not to heal, the bitterest smart.  
 But that which chills my blood with frozen dread,  
 The web of horror priestcraft round her spread,  
 Defies all laws of Nature !—nor can Time  
 E'er mitigate the wrong which strikes at Truth as Crime.

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*

The first dark shade from Destiny's coming night  
 Fell o'er a picture bathed in glowing light.  
 I watched her once upon a closing day,  
 The charmed sunbeams lingering o'er her stray,

With loving arms around her sister prest,  
The infant nestling fondly to her breast,  
Whilst pointing to the lovely sunset sky,  
She seems to read its wondrous mystery,  
And murmurs, while the listening air around  
Lifts tremulous to heaven each low sweet sound ;  
Long had I gazed unseen—when on mine ear  
Came jarring strains, still nearer and more near ;  
And as I saw approach a priestly train  
In solemn triumph towards the new-raised fane,  
Upon Eone's features boding grew  
A darkening gloom and a more pallid hue,  
Betraying deep within that worst of pain  
Which galls the noble soul—compelled to feign.  
They come ! with slow and measured tread they pass,  
The God upborne above the human mass ;  
She bowed not, though all bent—nor from her fell  
The briefest note of answering faith to tell ;  
Her brow, though gentle, was with firmness fraught,  
Her soul all rapt in one absorbing thought,  
She marked not—omen dire of coming ill—  
The ruthless look of stern, relentless will

Flung towards her, lightning-winged, as Narva past—  
High-priest of falsehood! his the withering blast.

Long, gloomily, she stood upon the spot,  
The scene in its suggestions lost, forgot,  
Until the infant's playful, fond caress,  
Awaking her to answering tenderness,  
At last she slowly took the homeward way,—  
Her breast to sorrow, mine to care a prey.

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*  
\*       \*       \*       \*       \*

Many there were attracted from afar  
By the bright radiance of our virgin star;  
Many the worshippers of lofty name  
Who sought in her to kindle answering flame.  
In vain their hope; for well-nigh it appeared  
Man never thus to her could be endeared;  
Until, at length, from Hellas' favoured shore  
A hero came, renowned for arms and lore;  
From mighty princes sprang his honoured race,  
Whose line by splendid deeds he aye could trace:

A victor father gloried in the son  
 Who, still a boy, his warrior laurels won ;  
 And, through unfolding of each blossoming year,  
 Read brightest promise for life's ripe career.  
 War's deadly tumult o'er, the high-souled youth  
 With equal ardour sought the fields of truth :  
 Thither, as if unknown by birth or fame,  
 With reverence and humility he came.  
 Wisdom he showed in all things ; most and best  
 In nobly bowing to each high behest ;  
 Fair Modesty, young Virtue's earliest grace,  
 Taught him to yield to ripe experience place ;  
 That homage should attend the life-tried sage,  
 Nor Youth usurp the majesty of Age.  
 Such was Ianthos, Hellas' gracious son ;  
 Worthy of all he sought—of all he won.

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*

It was a glorious morn : fair Nature smiled  
 A mother's blessing on her favourite child  
 As from the throne Acastes' voice proclaimed  
 His daughter plighted to Ianthos famed.

I knew not wherefore, yet, e'en while he spoke,  
 With impulse sudden as the lightning stroke,  
 I glanced towards Narva. As his face I read,  
 There crept through all my shuddering soul a dread,  
 Vague, terrible, and such as might  
 Seize on th' unwarned, when sullen, moonless night  
 Steals o'er the noon-tide beams, while mystery creeps  
 Chillingly through man's blood, and nature sleeps  
 As scared to deathlike trance. Upon that face  
 More than resolve defiant I could trace,  
 Stern, dark, and pregnant with unfathomed ill,  
 It omened all that vengeance could fulfil.

Scarce had the monarch's proclamation ceased  
 When, standing forth, appeared the subtle priest,  
 Claiming prompt service from the sacred band—  
 Æone chief, as noblest in the land—  
 Urgent at once that offerings due be given,  
 And homage rendered to the Powers of Heaven.

Breathless I watched, and marked how Narva's eye,  
 Cool and determined, questioned her reply ;

Saw, by the meaning of her answering glance,  
 This no unlooked-for, unprovided chance :  
 With resolution fixed as his, were seen  
 Blent majesty and meekness in her mien,  
 As, lowly bending at her father's throne,  
 Æone spoke, with tender, solemn tone,—  
 “ Most gracious sovereign lord ! most honoured sire !  
 Life I would prompt renounce at thy desire ;  
 No earth-born wish could rise I would not hush,  
 Or more, at thy command unquestioned crush.  
 Father ! whate'er betide, whate'er my doom,  
 Doubt not my heart reveres thee—till the tomb.”  
 Whilst on her quivering lip the words expire,  
 She trembling sank before her kingly sire,  
 Her upturned face o'er fraught with whelming grief,  
 Sorrow too deep from man to find relief.

•

Perplexed, yet touched, Acastes bent and spoke,  
 In words so low, they scarce the stillness broke.  
 I heard them not, but saw him gently raise  
 The form all watched bewildered in amaze ;

Saw her then, struggling with emotion, stand,  
 Whilst round her gathering came the priestess band,—  
 And, as her sister now was seen to glide,  
 A shape of beauty to Æone's side,  
 Her eye a moment turned upon the child  
 A glance of anguish so intense, so wild,  
 That through the hall was heard a smothered sigh—  
 All felt the pressure of some terror nigh.  
 "Father!" she said, "at length that solemn hour  
 Has come, when, bowing to a higher power,  
 With pain and grief I must asunder tear  
 False bonds I cannot, dare not, longer wear.  
 As daughter I am thine in nature's sight—  
 A daughter's duty may'st thou claim by right;  
 As vassal to the sovereign of this land  
 Before my lord with reverence due I stand.  
 Deal with thine own as to thee seemeth best,  
 But judge not, sire, I pray, at *his* behest."  
 Her eye with majesty on Narva turned;  
 The glance he did not shun, but cold returned;  
 And thus, mid silence scarcely stirred by breath,  
 Æone spoke—but 'twas to challenge death!

" Father, too long I feel have been repress  
 Those thoughts, since childhood, struggling in my breast ;  
 Till now, at last, this late confession given,  
 Seems offering little worthy thee or Heaven :  
 Yet blame not ruthlessly the bleeding heart,  
 Which thus avows itself a thing apart ;  
 Never were ties of earth more closely knit  
 Than those this day relentless bids me quit.

'Tis known to thee, to all before this throne,  
 As child, my duty and my faith were one ;  
 From doubt no chilling shadow yet was born,  
 To dim the sunshine of my early morn ;  
 I asked not whence the gods—by whom bestowed—  
 The marble, fraught with life and being, glowed.  
 So strong, so real, was my childhood's faith,  
 That though it long has slept the sleep of death,  
 In memory's visions I could still believe  
 The gods have smiled my offerings to receive.

Ye will remember—still is seen its trace  
 On man's, no less than Nature's beauteous face—

That day of horror, when the yawning earth  
And rending skies fierce messengers sent forth,  
To wrench from thousand loving hearts their all,  
While still in vain upon their gods they call ;  
When from yon heaving mountain sulphurous flame  
Shot up, 'gainst Heaven defiance to proclaim ;  
Quick-answered by one loud, avenging peal,  
Causing the solid earth itself to reel !  
Who, that then heard, can e'er forget that crash,  
The terrible and death-winged lurid flash ?  
Ye know where struck the bolt ; but scarce ye know  
How overwhelmingly then fell a blow  
On one—the child—who at that goddess' shrine  
Adored unquestioning a power divine !  
It were too long, and here no fitting place,  
In full the pathway of my soul to trace :  
At first, bewildered, all around me seemed  
Perplexing mystery, or vision dreamed ;  
That faith destroyed, once clear before my sight  
As objects glowing vividly in light,  
All grew uncertain,—yea, must false have seemed,  
But for the love which ever o'er me streamed.

No words of fire could tell the pains that burn  
Where hope, once fled, refuses to return ;  
Where mocking shadows beckon through a void,  
Or point where vacant altars witness faith destroyed !

Long had I wandered through mysterious gloom,  
Dark, dreary, lonely, silent as the tomb ;  
Bewildered ever, yet compelled to stray,  
Toiling and hopeless, on a pathless way ;  
Wearied,—yet finding not a spot to rest ;  
Perplexed,—yet nowhere guide to aid my quest ;  
A blighted sapling, blasted at the root,  
Ne'er to know summer in the flower or fruit.  
At last, with merciful commission given  
To soothe my soul, thus tost and sorrow-riven,  
Nature ! sublimely on my spirit broke  
Thy everlasting harmonies ! They spoke  
In language eloquent ! before my soul,  
Watching and listening, like a mighty scroll  
Of unimagined lore, the luminous skies  
Majestic spread their azure mysteries —

Wherein I read, adoring—till with sense  
 Quickened by thought prolific, grand, immense,  
 My soul sought earth : there, waiting, listening, found  
 O'er all reflected, echoed in each sound  
 That thought, so vast, it filled all space and time,  
 Pervading earth and sky with life sublime—  
 Power, Love, and Beauty, every-where combined—  
 Transcendent—perfect—ONE Eternal Mind !  
 Father,—nay, 'twas thy promise—hear me still !  
 In this, alone, I dare dispute thy will,—  
 Oh, frown not thus !—all else I well can bear—  
 Wrath on thy face, belovèd father—spare !

My God a Spirit, I no more could bend  
 Before false altars, nor my voice might blend  
 Its tones with those now discord to my heart ;  
 Long had their meaning in my thoughts no part.  
 Then, sire, because my soul abhors all guile,  
 I turned to Narva ;—with a scornful smile  
 He met, and would have crushed, my faith new found,—  
 Faith with my inmost being firmly bound.

His scorn repelled, by fearful threats he sought  
 To prove my glorious hopes too dearly bought.  
 Awhile, alas ! my coward heart succumbed,  
 Scared by the vision of earth's loves entombed,  
 I bowed, an alien, at the marble shrine,  
 And smothered in my soul the flame divine.  
 With penitence and shame that sin confest  
 No more its burthen weighs upon my breast ;  
 When last my service at the shrine was given,  
 Where long my soul with doubt and fear had striven,  
 Strength was supplied to brave all earthly doom—  
 Love—all I value—dies not in the tomb !  
 Narva ! that glance, O Heaven ! could I forget ?  
 Withstand him, father—frustrate that fierce threat !  
 He threatens *her*—my sister, and thy child !—  
 Declares my faith has hers alike defiled ;  
 That not alone I suffer—she shall be  
 Not less a victim sacrificed—through me ! ”  
 Æone, thus imploring, caught the child,  
 Shielding the fragile form in anguish wild ;  
 And though her speech the king besought, her eye  
 Fixed on the priest in mortal agony ;

Whilst he that gaze returned, cold, calm, severe,  
As one who knows not pity's sigh or tear.

As when the mighty tempest's prelude blast  
Subsides to ominous calm, all wait, aghast  
And silent, lest a breath upon the air  
May spur th' infuriate elements to declare  
More swift their vengeful purpose ; thus we stood,  
Through that vast space, voice, motion, thought, subdued,—  
Still,—hushed,—as though some giant wizard hand  
Outstretched high overhead transfixing wand ;  
Until, upon that awful lull profound,  
There came (almost relief) again a sound.  
Ianthos, all his noble soul on fire,  
No longer stemming his indignant ire,  
With rapid footsteps passed the priestess band,  
Beside Æone firmly took his stand,  
And ere another voice the silence broke,  
Hurling defiance, thus the echoes woke :—  
“ HOLD—! King and father ! at thy throne I stand,—  
Accepted suitor for thy daughter's hand,—

Hear *me* ! not him whose cold, malignant eye  
 Strikes death, ere judgment bids the victim die ;  
 King ! guard thy twofold trust !—dare to betray  
 Thy child ;—then were this mighty realm a prey  
 To the Eumenides' infuriate rage,  
 Such vengeance still were powerless to assuage  
 The wrath of Nemesis, or purge the stain  
 Of deed so foul from this thy land and reign.  
 Condemn *Æone* ! wherefore ? that blind law  
 May compass shadows with unseemly awe ?  
 Aye—scowl thy worst ! dark priest of falsehood's gods,  
 Propping thy feeble creed with cruel frauds :  
 In sight of heaven I claim my love, my bride,  
 No power of thine shall wrest her from my side !”  
 He ceased—the throbbing temple, heaving breast,  
 Nostril dilate, and flashing eye attest  
 Deep passion's surge within. *Æone* heard,  
 Moveless and mute, each keenly scornful word—  
 Then soft releasing from her hold the child,  
 She turned, and met her lover's glances wild,  
 With gentle pressure on his arm was laid  
 Her hand, while one low, tender word she said ;—

We heard it not, but saw his burning eye  
 Flash o'er her features,—one deep sobbing sigh  
 Escaped his bosom, whilst as 'neath a spell  
 Of Orphean magic sank down passion's swell ;  
 From cheek and brow of tempest's crimson glow  
 Ebb'd gently back the life-blood's fiery flow ;  
 The lips so late of scorn defiant seat,  
 Now parted, tremulous with emotion sweet ;  
 The eye, wrath-kindled, glancing but to blight,  
 Enraptured shone, dissolved in liquid light ;  
 And thus he stood a moment, as entranced,  
 Till Narva—demon !—towards the King advanced :  
 Then wakened, every feature flooding o'er  
 With anguish quenching ecstasy, no more  
 He strikes the whelming wave ; with stifled cry  
 Like mariner's in drowning agony,  
 Ianthos caught Æone to his breast  
 As if in death-pang clutched on ocean's foaming crest.

Unmoved, where every human heart was wrung,  
 The priest approached ; I knew his wily tongue,

Knew that his will to question or resent  
 Was but to barb the shaft of bow long bent ;  
 Of law proud arbiter at once and slave,  
 He loomed dark-missioned, bearing Destiny's glaive ;—  
 No more may father shield, or monarch save !

“ Great King ! I of thy ministers the chief  
 Sink at thy feet, o'erwhelmed with pain and grief ;  
 Compelled a fearful duty to maintain,  
 Before a royal father to arraign  
 The fairest daughter of a god-sprung race,  
 Of womanhood the jewel and the grace.  
 Long have I wavered ; sought by every art  
 To fix her wayward mind,—subdue her heart ;  
 But every hope this day has come to nought,  
 To brave the god's commands too long I sought !  
 Æone, thee, our priestess, I impeach  
 Of daring impious blasphemies to teach ;  
 And call on thee, sire, by that sacred power  
 Of which I stand vicegerent, in this hour  
 To judge according to the right, nor pause,  
 Although thy child it be who breaks heaven's laws.”

Absorbed as on each speaker's words I hung,  
Thought, vision, hearing, to the utmost strung,  
I scarce had marked Acastes; straining now  
To catch the dark-orbed augury of that brow  
Which oft was deemed inscrutable; in vain  
I gazed with eye and heart. No traitor pain  
Betrayed that soul whose sov'reignty began  
In empire o'er itself—true majesty of man.  
Save that the furrowed trace of time and thought  
Deepened as though each troubled moment wrought  
The work of peaceful years; and that the eye,  
Firm, self-possessed in piercing scrutiny,  
Still glowed as if the hidden depths below  
Held living fire; no sign was there to show  
That ere this dark, woe-freighted hour had past,  
The proud Acastes would with joy have cast  
His fame and empire to the winds, to be  
Unknown, unmarked, as man and father free.  
Hoarsely his accents fell, whilst slow and stern  
We saw his eye on the accuser turn :

"High-priest, the royal ear should first have heard  
 This weighty charge, now publicly preferred,  
 Never has prince profaned this heaven-sprung throne  
 By slighting public weal to guard his own ;  
 And well thou know'st no claim of kin would be  
 More than the alien's, or the slave's, to me.  
 But, as to slave or alien I extend  
 That mercy justice doth itself commend : —  
 Æone ! I absolve thee from the past !  
 Thy contumacy will not, cannot last.  
 Renounce this vain chimera of thy youth,  
 Return to what thy fathers held as truth ;  
 So shalt thou, ere the gracious queen of night  
 Reposing, veils her smile from mortal sight,  
 Become—the day is fixed—Ianthos' bride,  
 And be, as erst, thy parents'—country's pride."

As by Acastes' voice her name was spoken  
 Æone moved as though a spell were broken ;  
 With softest pity she those arms unwound  
 Which held her still like treasure lost and found ;

And as she turned her sister nestled near  
Perplexed and trembling with an unknown fear ;  
But still I sought in vain upon her face  
The wavering shadow of a doubt to trace ;  
Silent and statue-like she meekly bent  
With soul-gaze fixed upon the child intent.

Narva, who still and watchful had looked on,  
Here once again drew near the royal throne,  
With stonelike mien, that caused the flesh to creep,  
And form dilating, as with purpose deep :—  
“ Great king, thou sayest well ; and know’st to blend  
With justice mercy to each gracious end ;  
And ne’er could minister of thine in aught  
Question the purpose of thy noble thought.  
I question not ; for in thy princely mind  
Nature all royal virtues hath combined ;  
Thou know’st that tenderness, though manhood’s grace,  
Must ever yield to sov’reign duty place,  
That mercy, elsewhere fair, may show as stain  
Of weakness in the monarch, born to reign.

Then pardon me, thy servant, mighty lord,  
 Thus wretched—doomed to speak the ill abhorred—  
 One fact remains : oh, might Apollo's dart  
 Ere utterance strike with deadly aim this heart !  
 Sire, in this nation's ancient archives writ  
 Exists, with fate of king and empire knit,  
 A prophecy——” But, ere the rest declared,  
 The monarch, by some swift-wrought vision scared,  
 Upstarted, quivering as from hidden stroke,  
 Then sinking, from his breast a deep groan broke ;  
 One hand, extended, bid the priest forbear,  
 One pressed the brow, contracted in despair,  
 Whereon fast gathered drops from pangs distilled  
 Which years might with that moment's grief have filled.

Where fell those drops ? On her devoted head  
 Whose beauty lustre even in anguish shed ;  
 Self all forgotten in a father's woe,  
 She clung as shielding him from threat'ning foe ;  
 Not matchless Phidias, rapt, in visioned trance  
 E'er fixed to immortality a glance  
 Of love divine as that she upturned cast,—  
 The stainless victim, sinking 'neath the blast.

I never knew how closed that hour of pain ;  
 A film came o'er my eyes—oft since in vain  
 I strive the scattered fragments to recall—  
 A spell of horror held my sense in thrall.  
 I see in memory, through a mist, pale forms,  
 And growing darkness, as of coming storms ;  
 Hear whispering voices, scared by their own sound ;  
 See eyes that search mysteriously around,—  
 But all confused ; like broken, tangled mass,  
 Flickering and fading on the magic glass.

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Some days had past ; I saw her not, nor knew  
 Aught that a light upon her future threw,  
 Until one morn, 'twas publicly made known  
 The Princess' nuptials nought should now postpone ;  
 Upon the eve first named they should take place  
 With splendour, worthy of her state and race.  
 Behold yon hill, where towering cedars rise  
 In majesty of ages to the skies ;  
 Thither the eve before her nuptial day,  
 Eone called us ; mournfully the way

We trod, to where upon a tufted mound  
Our doomed one by Ianthos' side we found.  
She rose to welcome us as we drew near,  
With smile more sad than even the saddest tear ;  
Upon her features was such pallor cast  
As tells of inward struggle not yet past ;  
In vain her quivering lips would frame a sound,—  
In vain she sought for strength to look around,  
Trembling and failing, as with grief outworn,  
She turned upon Ianthos' breast to mourn.  
At length to calm restored, with sigh profound,  
Gazing in wordless tenderness around,  
She spoke with broken utterance : “ Oh, my friends,  
To witness thus your grief my bosom rends,  
Oh, rob me not of strength ! And thou most loved,  
Although thy courage be thus sternly proved,  
Be of my feeble, struggling heart the stay,  
Thine own will tell thee to what mine is prey.  
Turn not on me that sad reproachful look !—  
My heart will break—thy blame I cannot brook.  
Spare me ! Night gathers round—the way grows black,  
A rugged, steep, unknown, untrodden track ;

The light beyond burns dim ! Oh, cease thy prayers ;  
Too well I know the heart's seductive snares."

Alas ! as vainly in that hour of need  
Have sought for succour from the storm-laid reed.  
Before her, prostrate, at these words they fall,  
In anguished tones "Æone !" wailing call ;  
"Æone ! Peerless midst the universe,  
In mercy hold ! thy fatal choice reverse ;  
Draw not upon thy land such fearful curse !"  
Silent she stood with hands and eyes upraised  
As though into the very heavens she gazed,  
Whilst o'er her cheek there came a burning glow,  
Chasing the pallor from that face of woe—  
Convulsive shudd'rings passed through all her frame,  
She heard not, though they still pronounced her name.  
She seemed as wrestling with some mighty power,  
Which must be crushed—if ever—in that hour.  
At length all ceased : before us calm she stood,  
As one who had resisted fire and flood,  
Thenceforth secure from tempter's with'ring breath—  
Who knows the worst of bitterness in death.

“It may not be,” she said, “henceforth forbear  
To urge me faith and conscience to forswear.  
Think not that pains of death or fears beyond  
Could tempt my soul thus sorely to despond ;  
To bring down sorrow on the guiltless head  
Of all I love,—for this my heart has bled.  
My father ! pity him, beloved friends,—  
His will, not less than mine, to duty bends,  
Rather to save him from the crushing blow  
Still threatened by my watchful, subtle foe,  
Than to escape myself the poison draught,  
Have I shrunk back, a coward, ere I quaffed.  
Long has been known to me in full extent  
A prophecy with doom of horror blent,  
In which since ages it has been foreshown  
That one, a priestess, daughter of our throne,  
Should by a father be condemned to die  
False to her faith, on charge of blasphemy.  
A fearful meaning doth the high-priest read,  
Darkly interpreting a darker creed ;  
Foreshadowing fiercest vengeance on the land  
Should those designed evade the dire demand.

Unhappy father ! terrible the strife !  
A nation's safety, or a daughter's life !  
Through love, through reason, has he sought to move,  
Not cold and harsh with sternness to reprove  
That resolution which all hope must blight  
And curtain memory in starless night.  
Appalling conflict ! agonizing choice !  
Where love implores, and duty claims a voice ;  
A thousand tempters whisper to my heart  
That 'twere no crime of truth to veil a part,  
To close within the soul a sacred flame  
Of which man shuns the light, and scorns the name,  
Whilst sin it is to whelm in sorrow those  
Who cannot share, nor may my fate oppose,—  
That sacrifice incurred to no sure end  
Is for a phantom—aimless—to contend.”

Here pausing ; o'er her features came amain  
Something between a shadow and a pain ;  
It trembled there a moment, and was gone,  
Again her spirit all undimmed outshone,

"Thou glory of the Infinite!" she cried,  
 "Thou Sovereign of the Universe, and Guide!  
 Beyond all claim of parents, country, friends,  
 Is Thine, with whom our spirit's being blends:  
 On earth, and everlastingly the soul  
 Belongs to Thee—its source, its light, its goal;  
 To follow Truth through life, and 'neath the shade  
 Of hovering Death to hold it undismayed,  
 However tempests rage, and clouds obscure,  
 Though mystery perplex, temptation lure,—  
 This is man's part; beyond doth mortal sight  
 Fail—in dense darkness, or as blinding light—  
 The rest—the *end* is Thine, Thou Power sublime,  
 Whose present glance pervades all space and time."  
 She ceased, with clasping hands and eyes upturned,  
 Whilst all her face with inspiration burned,  
 Already she appeared transformed to light  
 Prepared from Earth that moment to take flight.  
 The glow had passed;—again she looked around,  
 While from each troubled heart broke forth the sound:  
 "Æone, oh, Æone, blessed thou!  
 Already glory circles round thy brow—  
 Before thy mighty Lord in anguish here we bow."

If such our grief, 'twere vain of his to tell  
 Who heard of all his hopes the dying knell;  
 Since first with look reproachful he had sued  
 He seemed by torture into calm subdued;  
 And save that through his frame a shudder ran,  
 As when Death's harbingers first seize on man,  
 He might have been a doomed, unhappy one,  
 By fell Medusa-glare transfixed to stone.

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That night upon the softly moon-lit green  
 Full many a restless, wandering form was seen,  
 Now gliding mournfully absorbed in thought,  
 Now with raised hands as though it Heaven besought,  
 And murmuring voices floated on the air—  
 "Æone! Mercy, Heaven! Oh, hear and spare!"

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The noon-tide heats were past; the God of Day  
 In quiet majesty pursued his way,  
 Regardless of the anguished glances cast,  
 As lengthening shadows told the moments past.  
 I could not look upon the busy crowd,  
 The gay attire that mocked a looming shroud;

I longed to turn from man, and from the light—  
And close for ever there my eyes in dreamless night !

Prey to that inward fever through which sense  
Chafes at slow time impatient of suspense,  
Yet holds the moment with a maddened grasp,  
As though it wrenched a loved one from our clasp,  
With restless steps unconsciously I sought  
A spot with every gentler memory fraught.  
There with Æone, children, we had strayed  
Beneath the spreading palm's luxuriant shade ;  
There had I listened, wondering whence she knew  
To find a voice in every plant that grew.  
Upon that gentle slope once stood a bower  
Formed of each beautiful and fragrant flower :  
Freed from the cares that royalty molest,  
The wearied monarch here was wont to rest.  
Now amid flowers that hung and intertwined  
Almost encircled were two forms enshrined :  
Mother and child had sought this loved retreat,  
Destined on earth, alas ! no more to meet !

Though from Asträa mystery veiled the hour  
When burst the storm she long had seen to lour ;  
Although no sigh unchecked, nor rising tear  
In those around betokened inward fear,  
Though all before her told of nuptial joy,  
Nor aught betrayed the presence of alloy,  
The whole fell cold and hollow on her heart,  
From all that dreary show she stood apart.

The last fair flower she wove as I drew near  
Within that wreath a bride should never wear !  
Then ceased, and sighing gazed in sorrow down  
On beauty needing not the gem or crown.  
The daughter, kneeling, on that lap had laid  
Her face, to hide the anguish it betrayed :  
From time to time she half upraised her head,  
While her lips moved, as though faint words were said ;  
But still the thought died voiceless as it rose,  
Such pain could find nor vent nor yet repose :  
One single hour, she knew, must seal her doom ;  
If false—Ianthos' bride ; if true to faith—a tomb.

Whilst thus I watched, came floating on the air  
 A sound which wrung my soul with fresh despair.  
 I knew the chorus of the nuptial song,  
 Like hymn of triumph towards us borne along,  
 Whilst far as eye could reach a regal train  
 Wound by the river, and the fertile plain  
 Showed gathering thousands, who with loud acclaim  
 Aroused the echoes to Æone's name.

Alas! 'twere needless torture to portray  
 The hollow pageantry of that dread day;  
 To tell what priests and warriors swelled the band,  
 How beauty— all the fairest in the land—  
 There splendidly appavelled, onward came  
 Homage to render to our princess' fame.  
 But that those scenes and images a brand  
 Left on my soul as traced by fiery hand,  
 Or as though touched by lightning flashing past  
 Were fixed in flame while thought and being last;  
 That phantom crowd with all its pageantry,  
 That gorgeous nightmare haunting memory,

Now clearly visioned to my shrinking eyes,  
 An undistinguishable mass would rise—  
 Not as the bridal pomp to herald bliss,  
 But shapeless horror—crowning an abyss.

The crowd now paused. I saw the monarch tread  
 The path which to his sanctuary led,  
 While following closely were a chosen few  
 Who, as he entered, backward reverent drew ;  
 Acastes, pausing, on the threshold stood,  
 All his stern soul by agony subdued,  
 Till mastering grief, “Æone,” low he sighed,  
 “The hour is come—the bridegroom claims the bride ;  
 Now is the moment must decide thy fate ;  
 Look on thy mother !—’Tis not yet too late !”  
 “Ye gods ! what mean these words ?” Astræa cried ;  
 “What fearful mystery do ye strive to hide ?  
 Acastes ! child !—as mother and as spouse  
 I claim a right which earth—yea, heaven—allows.  
 What mean those words ?—the cloud upon thy brow ?  
 Æone, what that anguish which even now

Spoke in thy tones and mien ? Acastes, say  
Why all so hollow on this bridal day ?”

“Mother !” in broken accents she replied,  
“Another voice now calls me from thy side ;  
This life no longer I may name my own ;  
A path before me opens all unknown :  
Yet, mother, wheresoever led, this heart  
Will cling to thee as now when I depart.  
Oh ! ill thou think’st do I thy love repay—  
My spirit fails—I dare no longer stay !  
My father ! lo ; the hour ! away—away !”

I saw, as through a mist, one long embrace ;  
Æone kneel, Asträa, bending, place  
The woven symbol ; then, with breathless gasp  
And struggle as within a torture grasp,  
Her lips convulsive moved ; collapsed she fell,  
Before her lips could frame the low “ Farewell !”

In anguished grief Æone bent to press  
On that white brow one agonised caress,  
Then whispered faint and low, “ E’en thus ’tis well ;  
She sees not—hears not—mother, fare thee well !”

Speechless, Acastes took his daughter's hand,  
His brow resuming all its stern command ;  
The threshold passed, forthwith he summoned aid  
For her within by sorrow prostrate laid.  
Then bride and monarch head the splendid throng  
Which moves with measured steps in state along :  
Below us stretched wide ocean, on whose breast  
The God of Day declining sought his rest,—  
Upheaving, like a mass of liquid gold,  
His gorgeous bed of billows gently rolled ;  
Beneath the cliffs—its pride forgot—the wave  
Caressing sought each pebbly bank and cave,  
As though its soothing cadence would aspire  
To swell the pealing hymeneal choir ;  
Landward mild zephyrs whispered 'mongst the trees,  
And fragrant blossoms perfumed every breeze,  
The birds in gentle carol told their love,  
One feeling, only, Nature seemed to move :  
'Twas scene to bid the soul exulting gaze,  
And fill all hearts at ease with rapturous praise !  
Mine felt no charm, all but as mockery shone,  
Each colour false, a discord every tone ;

Ill-omened gleamed the glowing orb and flood—  
The sun, a lurid flame, the ocean,—blood.

The steep ascended, at the temple-gate  
Æone reached the threshold of her fate,—  
There paused, as one awaking from a trance,  
And cast o'er sea and sky one mourning glance;  
Then on the sinking sun's departing rays  
She fixed a deep and tender, tearless gaze,  
Until the last red streak had passed away,  
When—never more to look on dawn or day—  
In silence to the shrine the victim moved,  
In silence clasped the hand of him she loved.

Silent—all silent!—breathless grew the throng,  
As Narva to the altar' passed along;  
Before the god, with air of proud command,  
Ruthless and resolute, he took his stand:  
But as he passed I saw Acastes shrink  
As one might shudder on a precipice brink.

Now ominous arose the high-priest's voice;  
“The hour is come, Æone, for thy choice!

Before the king, thy father, here I claim  
 Obedience, in the high and holy name  
 Of those great gods through whom with worship due  
 Thy race and kingdom to such glory grew ;  
 Before these altars, priestess, here must thou  
 With reverential adoration bow ;  
 Renounce the blasphemies that cloud thy name ;  
 Allegiance to our gods once more proclaim :  
 So shalt thou stand absolved from former crime,  
 But bound henceforth by vow throughout all time  
 To hold each word, each action, and each thought,  
 Subservient to that faith our fathers taught.  
 Thus art thou free, as priestess, daughter, bride—  
 The choice of fate is thine ; beware, decide !”

While breathless, anguished, listened all around,  
 Æone's eyes were bent upon the ground ;  
 One doubted if the words had reached her ear,  
 So little did her mien betoken fear ;  
 No gesture, shudder, not the lightest thrill,  
 Showed that her sentence struck an inward chill,  
 Till Narva ceased—then slow she raised her head,  
 But not toward him her eyes or steps were led ;

With all the melting softness in her air  
 By soul of womanhood diffused there,  
 And yet resolved as manhood in its might  
 When called of justice to defend the right ;  
 She sought her father's side, and lowly kneeled  
 Undaunted by the doom her lips thus sealed.

“ Father, to thee I turn,—nor answer one  
 Strange to my heart, whose rights are there unknown ;  
 I turn to thee, not vainly to implore—  
 Of my untimely fate I speak no more—  
 Only again thy pardon to demand  
 For scant submission to thy high command.  
 I question not its justice—thou as king  
 Art bound each legal sacrifice to bring,  
 E'en though that sacrifice a daughter's life  
 Wrenched from thy heart all torn with inward strife.  
 I might remonstrate in the name of One,  
 Ruler of kings, eternal and alone,  
 Whose laws, revealed in nature, great and good,  
 Make no dark claims to offerings stained with blood.  
 But wherefore? while His glory is denied,  
 His right and majesty at once defied,

While other gods claim homage to Him due,  
 And duties all are tinged with false faith's hue,  
 As vain to speak of colour to the blind,  
 As truth to man, while darkness fills the mind.  
 Think not that I on thee reproach would cast,  
 Father, in this dread hour of life the last ;  
 None I accuse,— for by extremest deed  
 They do but prove how earnest is their creed ;  
 Nor stand I here the judge o'er inward thought  
 To test the specious good with ill inwrought ;  
 To say what colour pride may lend to zeal,—  
 Against my sentence I make no appeal."

Hereon she rose, with strained prophetic eye,  
 As one empowered the future to descry ;  
 Whilst all her countenance at once grew bright—  
 The glowing outburst of an inward light.  
 "I see a time," she cried, "when from that throne  
 Where reign Omnipotence and Love alone,  
 The cloud shall pass which now its splendour hides,  
 And all be light where darkness still abides !  
 Great Spirit of the universe sublime !  
 Thou Infinite ! pervading earth and time,

Break forth ! unveil Thy glory ! rend the skies !  
 Let blindness pass from man's benighted eyes !  
 From nature's breast let hidden treasures burst,  
 Ope fountains worthy of the soul's deep thirst,  
 Give ears to hear thy music in each sound,  
 Give sense to feel all being with Thee bound ;  
 Thus peace and love shall reign to bless the earth,  
 And death be welcomed as immortal birth !”

Her words had ceased ; and on her cheek and brow  
 To marble whiteness faded the deep glow ;  
 Her eyes, released from visionary spell,  
 Fixed on her father in a mute farewell.  
 Again she kneeled, it seemed some lingering thought  
 Upon her quivering lip expression sought :  
 At last, so low we had not heard the sound  
 But that deep horror stilled ev'n breath around,  
 The words were murmured : “O my father, say,  
 Ere I part hence on life's last lonely way,  
 My sister—is her promised pardon sure ?  
 By all life's memories I thee adjure—  
 Since that dark ‘saying’ points to one alone,  
 And mine the death that should for all atone—

Let neither malice nor a specious zeal  
O'ercome thy solemn vow—or this my last appeal !”

Acastes spoke not: as though turned to stone  
He stood, nor uttered word, nor sigh, nor groan,  
Until Eone once more spoke his name,  
Again that promise from his lips would claim ;  
Then in a voice so strange it made all start,  
It rang as were a sepulchre that heart,  
The king gave answer to his child's last prayer  
In words she could not doubt, nor others dare.  
He raised her—for a moment did they stand  
As spell-bound, eye to eye, and hand to hand ;  
Till, as emotion's torrent broke at last,  
His arms around his child the father cast,  
In one, long, mute embrace her form he held,  
As if resolve that sorrowing moment quelled ;  
Then, with an effort of that mighty will  
An instant silenced, but all-conquering still,  
Again the monarch stood, stern, calm, and cold,  
The father's sufferings from that hour untold.  
No words were spoken, but a sign he made  
At which the priests approached with solemn tread

Upon those virgin robes a sable veil  
 They cast, while all around broke forth the wail—  
 “Æone! bride of Death—thy bed the tomb;  
 Light of our eyes! without thee all is gloom;  
 Joy of our hearts! oh, yield; nor dare thy doom!”  
 We saw her, as the priest would touch her hand,  
 Avoid his grasp with mild but firm command,  
 Approach Ianthos, and in gentle tone  
 Murmur, “’Tis thine, beloved, thine alone!  
 Thy hand alone shall lead me to the grave,  
 Thy strength uphold me, though it cannot save.”

He knew his fate, and was prepared, if aught  
 Prepare the soul for fate defying thought,—  
 And yet the look with which he met her gaze  
 Was that of wand’rer lost in some dread maze;  
 Who, through the pitchy, vap’rous night around,  
 Sees dimly monstrous shapes, and hears the sound  
 Of horrid whisp’rings, hissed with freezing breaths,  
 Of nameless torments, unimagined deaths,—  
 Yet doubts reality, and almost deems  
 That horrors such as these can be but dreams.

She trembled, and her sad appeal renewed  
In tones that spoke of love all unsubdued.  
“Ianthos! mine till death! such was thy vow;  
My more than life—oh, do not fail me now!”  
Her proffered hand was taken; ere they past  
One lingering look upon the king she cast;  
Then onward following as the high-priest led,  
The bridal chorus chaunting for the dead,  
Retraced that way since then by all abhorred,—  
Whither?—say whither? darkness and the sword,  
Ye silent ministers of crime and rage,  
And blinded zeal!—oh, ne’er shall history’s page  
Record a tale which arts mysterious hide  
Than this more fearful of our ill-starred bride!  
Spectral arises on yon shore that throng  
Gliding with sobs and plaintive dirge along,  
While peaceful ripples to the shore the wave:  
Rise, Ocean, whelm them—since no Power will save!  
And thou, pale Cynthia, veil thy beams from sight,  
Lest ever henceforth tainted be thy light!  
Stars, wherefore gaze ye? close your thousand eyes!  
To witness such foul wrong impugns the skies.

And thou, Great Spirit ! where ? That blessed face  
 Rebukes such doubt. There Love, there Heaven, I trace ;  
 The universe on thee might wondering gaze,  
 And to thy God break forth in grateful praise ;  
 So calm, so solemn, glorious, was thy mien,  
 Witness of truth eternal, though unseen.  
 Beneath yon archway, turned, I saw thee stand,  
 Woman in softness, princess in command ;  
 Wan light upon thy face the moonbeams throw ;  
 Darkness behind thee, and the tide's deep flow.  
 Now at thy feet behold Ianthos kneel,  
 But not,—'t were useless,—in a last appeal ;  
 'Tis but the latest homage of a heart  
 Worthy, with thine, in all to bear a part :  
 Mute, tenderly, I saw thee bend and press  
 Upon thy lover's brow one last caress ;  
 Then on the wailing crowd beheld thee raise  
 Thine eyes in straining, loving, lingering gaze ;  
 Each known to friendship or compassion long  
 Was sought amidst that mourning, sobbing throng ;  
 Then, stretching forth thine armstoward us, toward Heaven,  
 We saw thee pass ! Were e'er the crime forgiven

Wherewith time's annals in that hour were stained  
 And nature's truest teachings all profaned,  
 'Twere e'en that while death's shadow o'er thee fell,  
 Æone! *Blessing* was thy last farewell.

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Thou weep'st! I thank thee, stranger, for thy tears,  
 The first with mine to mingle through long years.  
 My tale is done; for since she turned away  
 'Neath that dark tower to tread her fatal way,  
 A deep, impenetrable veil was cast  
 Upon the hour we deemed Æone's last.  
 Then whence, thou ask'st, the doubts my words imply,  
 Involving still her fate in mystery?  
 That doubt,—oh, horror far exceeding death!—  
 The very thought has power to check the breath:  
 'Twas said by one, a priest of Narva's train,  
 In that same night they bore her o'er the main  
 To where, precipitous rising from the flood,  
 A mountain stands, a fitting scene for blood;  
 And there, despite remonstrance—for one heart  
 Shuddered in deed so black to bear a part—

On landing was the victim blindfold led,  
 Unmurm'ring, to a cavern dank and dread,  
 Wherein they left her, to a living grave  
 For ever, without help to cheer or save !  
 Oh, no : 'twas fancy of a brain distraught !  
 Never hath fate or man such horror wrought  
 On one, however dyed in foulest crime,  
 As that on her, the fairest thing of time :  
 And yet 'twas told with an expiring breath,  
 Till then concealed through fears of threatened death ;  
 What were too black for that relentless mind  
 To plan and execute with skill refined ?  
 In vain the doubt I struggle to evade,  
 It clouds my woe with deepest, deadliest shade.

Well mayst thou question what became the fate  
 Of him whose sorrows nought could e'er abate :  
 Uncertain is my answer ; from the hour  
 We saw Ianthos kneel beneath that tower,  
 For ever from our eyes he passed away ;  
 But whether of despair the speedy prey  
 He sought relief beneath the tempting flood,  
 Or found amid the forest leaves a shroud,

To me unknown ; yet may I well believe  
 A tale one told me who would scarce deceive,  
 Of friend who, wandering in a distant land,  
 Heard of a sage whose influence none withstand,  
 Teaching that wisdom dwells in truth and love ;  
 That God is One—on earth, in heaven above ;  
 Life, but a pathway to a glorious home ;  
 Death, a brief sleep—a resting-place, the tomb :  
 The once-known features, changed from youth's first prime,  
 Fixed in the majesty of strength sublime,  
 Ianthos to our wanderer reveal  
 As that great sage whose brow bore wisdom's seal ;  
 If so it be, and wherefore doubt in aught  
 To find *thee* in the soul thy love had taught ?  
 Then,—though no urn nor sculptured marble show  
 That one so glorious ever lived below,—  
 ONE ! thou hast left a track 'midst night  
 Will never fade till merged in perfect light !

END OF THE FIRST PART.

## Second Part.



NIGHT, night, eternal night ! again mine eye  
Wakes to thy dreary, cold monotony ;  
Sleep, sweet enchantress ! Misery's last friend,  
Upraise thy magic wand to surer end !  
In deep oblivion all my senses steep,  
Nor call up scenes I have no tears to weep.

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Strange destiny ! to be thus set apart  
From all that quickens life within the heart ;  
Yet desolate, all light save mem'ry gone,  
To feel that stagnant life still creeping on. [walls  
Strange—strange—all strange !—immured in rugged  
Where damp, from ages gathered, trickling falls—  
To see in conflict with the deeper gloom  
The torchlight glimmer on my vaulted tomb ;

Around me forms of strange, gigantic mould,  
 Like voiceless watchers o'er a fate untold ;  
 Or,—had I not such direful cause to know,  
 The demon gods reign paramount below,—  
 I might conceive these shapes of giant race  
 Which on the darkness deeper darkness trace,  
 Mute, sullen, brooding,—still by pride sustained,—  
 Hell's once triumphant deities enchained.

Strange—strange—all strange !—how weary seems the  
 Since last mine eyes beheld Creation's face ;        [space  
 Custom, that makes familiar all things new,  
 Here lends to horror but a darker hue ;  
 My wond'ring eyes still search into the gloom,  
 My soul has yet but fathomed half its doom.

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'Tis day on earth !    Soft gleaming from afar  
 Again appears yon solitary star ;  
 At first a ray of hope it shone to me,  
 A signal light to guide me to the free.  
 Delusive hope ! 'twixt me and that lone ray,  
 Unseen until it yawned across my way,

A gulf extends,—impassable, and black  
 As is my fate! Along that pathless track  
 My eyes still wander, till my weary brain  
 Finds rest in stupor from the sick dull pain  
 Of yearning ; — ceaseless — cureless — and in vain !  
 Time ! rainbow-winged with hope is still thy flight  
 Through realms of busy life in air and light,  
 Whilst thou, ne'er pausing, still the suff'rer's friend  
 Know'st in each cup of sorrow balm to blend.  
 With broken pinions here through endless night  
 Thou drag'st the weary unelastic weight  
 Of hours that die in birth. Why should I give  
 To those dark moments reck'ning? They who *live*  
 Need no uncertain, toilsome art to keep  
 Tale of the seasons ; they can sow and reap.  
 For those who but exist, of all bereft,  
 Whom grief hath crushed till not one hope is left,  
 The seasons are no more, though ages roll  
 In ceaseless motion towards their destined goal ;  
 Days, weeks, years, centuries, to them must seem  
 One vast unchanging present, where no beam  
 E'er stirs the stagnant darkness.       \*       \*

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Was ever one with such relentless haste  
Thrust down from heights of joy to desert waste?  
That crescent moon which o'er Ianthos' brow  
Shone, heavenly witness to his love and vow,  
Scarce waning, flooded o'er the path that led  
To this dark home the bride whom Death had wed.  
I feel again those hands that bound my eyes,  
I hear again around me sobs and sighs,  
Mingling, till lost in one funereal wail—  
The dirge of sympathy without avail.  
More and more distant grew the solemn tones  
Until they died away in feeble moans,  
And I was borne along I knew not where,  
Denied the mercy should have struck me there;  
I heard a sound as of the flowing tide,  
And felt our bark o'er swelling waters glide—  
How long I knew not; till at length arose  
A murmur, stifled promptly by my foes;  
And o'er my cheek and breast there grew a chill,  
And through my frame there crept an icy thrill;  
A sick'ning horror fixed within the air  
Might blindness' self have warned no light was there.

Onward, and onward, o'er the fatal way  
 My guides still pressed, as though they feared delay—  
 Whither? they said not, nor cared I to hear;  
 Where hope has perished, nought remains to fear—  
 At length they paused; when on the silence broke  
 A voice that low sepulchral echoes woke.  
 I knew those cold, relentless tones too well,  
 None else were fitting such a fate to tell:—  
 “Again, perverted one! thy royal sire  
 Offers with mercy to replace his ire;  
 Resign these blasphemies that cost thy blood,—  
 Renounce the phantom thou hast named a god!  
 Pardon awaits thee on a father's breast;  
 Love on a bridegroom's;—choose; behold the rest!”  
 The bandage falls; and my bewildered sight  
 Opens at once upon these realms of night.  
 A moment passes, ere from torpid trance  
 My soul awaking, meets that demon glance—  
 Meets it unquailing! Heaven! 'twas thy great power  
 Upheld me then—uphold me in this hour!  
 Thine was the spirit swelling in my breast,  
 Thine were these words by horror unrepent:—

"Think'st thou that terror can this heart subdue?  
 Or darkness tone my spirit to its hue?  
 Thou hadst my answer in the living light;  
 Hear it again—in blank, eternal night!  
 All that thou off'rest, love, air, light of day,  
 I here renounce! Behold me! Seize thy prey!"

"Self-immolated! Think not that my steel  
 In mercy falling shall thy suff'rings heal.  
 Here look around, and read thy coming fate;  
 Here, slowly lingering, shalt thou death await,  
 Blaspheme our gods, and call on thine to save,—  
 Th' All-powerful,—to unlock thy living grave.  
 Thus drag existence on, 'midst torturing fears,  
 With none to share, and none to dry thy tears;  
 At once of Life and Death the struggling prey  
 I leave thee! Choose! No more we brook delay."

"Then, leave me, Man of Ill! and tempt no more:  
 Blind instrument! thy mission now is o'er,  
 A mightier hand than thine wields fate's dark glaive,  
 To that alone I yield;—to slay, or save."

Again I hear that echoing voice awake,  
 The last that e'er shall this dread silence break : —  
 "The choice is thine ! I leave thee to thy tomb.  
 Perish, accursèd — in thy self-framed doom !"

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Pale lamp, thou flickerest ! Would that e'en this day  
 My hand no more could tend thy fainting ray ;  
 That, falling from above, thy last sad gleams  
 Might die o'er sleep, no more disturbed by dreams !

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Oh, skill in cruelty ! refinèd art  
 That lengthens torture for the bleeding heart ;  
 Was it not, then, enough that I must die  
 A thing of horror, cast from earth and sky,  
 Without prolonging such terrific doom  
 By leaving sustenance within a tomb ?

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Alas ! my soul is faint ; its light burns low ;  
 Confusion gathers round my brooding woe ;

My limbs are heavy with a weary pain,  
 Unrest still struggling against languor's chain.  
 On thee pure, gushing fountain let me gaze,  
 As one last treasured link with other days ;  
 The melancholy murmur of thy flow  
 Has sounded dirge-like, wakening more than woe ;  
 Like voices borne by echo from the past  
 Ere I, a wreck, to misery's waves was cast.  
 Yet not alone with sorrow charged thy tones,  
 Kind fountain !—howe'er mingled with my moans ;  
 Nature, the tender mother, all-sustaining,  
 Even here her child, an outcast, not disdaining,  
 Hath sent thy lullaby, sweet babbling rill,  
 To calm, where hope no more can soothe or thrill.  
 Whilst yet I gaze, a half-spent faded beam  
 Comes o'er my soul with faint and sickly gleam.  
 Have I thus watched thee pass from me away,  
 Nor asked if thy dark course may lead to day ?  
 Oh, wearied limbs ! oh, heart with grief outworn !  
 Can aught remain to seek ; or aught anew to mourn ?

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Alas ! upon this dank, mysterious way  
 My feet grow ever feebler as I stray ;  
 Why aimless struggle thus perversely choose ?  
 What is there left for me to win or lose ?

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All lost ! Of hope that one pale, flickering spark  
 Is gone, and all within again is dark !  
 Why lure me, faithless stream, to bootless end,  
 Thou who hast seemed till now my only friend,  
 Whisper of freedom, and of dawning light ?—  
 Prepare for my scathed soul anew a blight ?—  
 Beckon me on, to find my path at length  
 Hemmed in by crags of everlasting strength,  
 Beneath which forth thy peaceful current flows  
 Unheeding my complaint, and cureless woes ?

Ah, no ! forgive me, faithful, gentle rill,  
 My misery spoke, my heart discerns thee still ;  
 As now my torch-light glances o'er thy face,  
 Tearful farewells there glistening I can trace ;  
 And as thy broken murmurs meet mine ear,  
 The sighs of parting grief I seem to hear.

Sweet child of silence born ! obscure, unknown,  
Pursuing still thy dismal course alone,  
I follow thee, in fancy, into light,  
Midst flowers emerging on some rocky height,  
Whence, falling white as the untainted snow,  
The valley smiles thy welcome from below.  
I see thy course now opening on the view  
Midst beauties of each form and varied hue,  
Whilst every mountain steep and wooded vale  
Sends forth its tribute thy approach to hail.  
Thus, swelling, from a rill a river grown,  
I watch thy windings as thou flowest on,  
All pure as when thou left'st thy unknown source,  
See thee pursuing now thy sunny course,  
Dispensing verdure o'er the fruitful plain,  
And causing lands long waste to bloom again.  
There, on thy banks, fresh youth, untouched by care,  
Wanders with ardent fancy, free as air ;  
True vows are softly breathed, in murmur low,  
And music echoes thy melodious flow ;  
There, too, the world-worn wayfarer his woes  
Forgets, by thee lulled gently to repose,—

In dreams recalling vanished scenes like this  
 When childhood round him shed its short-lived bliss,—  
 Again, encircled in a mother's arms—  
 The trusted haven from all earthly harms—  
 He hears the murmured blessing mixed with tears—  
 Why did they fall? *he* saw no cause for fears;—  
 Again glows forth a form more fair than aught  
 Reality or fancy since had brought :  
 Where is all now ? Hush ! calmly let him sleep ;  
 Too soon, alas ! he must awake—to weep.

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Where, where am I ? and what those pictures bright ?  
 Methought I breathed fresh air, beheld sunlight,  
 Heard flowing waters, zephyrs 'mid the leaves,  
 Saw youth and maiden bind the golden sheaves,  
 Gazed on the odorous dell, the shelt'ring wood ;  
 Where are they all ? plains, mountains, river, flood ?

Where are they all ? Oh not on ye I cried,  
 Pale phantoms rising round me through the void !  
 Why glide ye thus in noiseless sad array,  
 Belovèd shades ! distract me not ! Away !

Oh ceaseless, hopeless struggle ! do I wake ?  
 A spell is on my soul I cannot break :  
 Beneath me yawns a deep abyss ; Despair,  
 Ravening, with arms outstretched, awaits me there.  
 Fond talisman ! sole relic left of earth,  
 Woven by her, alas ! who gave me birth ;  
 Poor wreath, that still beside my rocky couch  
 Or near my heart doth lie—thy withered touch  
 Might quicken life when stagnant in my blood,  
 Or still it, swelling like a wind-tossed flood—  
 Speak to me now ! my soul thus darkly tried,  
 Seeks all in vain its monitor and guide.

Sweet mother ! tendérer than brooding dove,  
 Who wove this symbol'd charact'ry of love,  
 'Twas mercy hid from thee this Titan cave,  
 Wherein those flowers, like me now find a grave.

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Horror afresh ! What form now blights my eyes ?  
 Amidst thy shrunken leaves and buds there lies,  
 Writhing, a hideous slimy reptile, born  
 Abortion of a midnight without morn,

Creature of horror, meant to live and die  
 In Stygian darkness, and to human eye  
 Repulsive as the shapes by Nightmare wrought  
 To scare her victims, or, as brains distraught  
 Create amidst their chaos. Hence! away!  
 Not there—not there! oh misery—away!

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And thus, still breathing, is my wasting form  
 Enforced companion to the reptile worm,  
 Crushed down and buried in a living grave,  
 Where Death, fell tyrant, holds, yet scorns his slave;  
 Without e'en dark oblivion's fountain nigh  
 To cure woe's sharpest pang, and bitterest sigh.  
 O Friendship! heaven-sent, like the gentle dew  
 The parched to quicken into life anew,  
 Is there no drop of thy celestial balm  
 My thirsting spirit to refresh and calm?  
 Love! swelling ocean, once whereon my life  
 Upborne almost forgot the threat'ning strife,  
 Of all that brimming flood remains no part,  
 No sheltering haven for my shipwrecked heart?

Or was my world a dream? a phantasm wrought  
 By fancy out of dark eternal Naught?  
 A dream that I have lived—have been beloved?  
 A dream that amidst living scenes I moved?  
 A dream that I have seen heaven's vault of blue  
 Reflect on ocean azure's richest hue?  
 Is there no sky, no ocean, and no sun?  
 No moon, nor stars, their voiceful course to run?  
 Was all a vision? and am I no more  
 Than sport for fiends on Erebus' grim shore?

Nature, benignant mother! faithful still,  
 Thy voice replies in that pure fountain rill;  
 Oh, no! it was no dream, thou Power divine,  
 For thou art real, and my world was thine!

No dream!—Yet all the heart or eye has known  
 Of beauty, gladness, friendship, love, are flown!  
 If thus the soul's realities may all  
 Perish, like transient stars that gleaming fall,  
 What is there left but universal doom—  
 Devouring Death,—one everlasting Tomb?

What has befallen ? Till now, though all was night  
 Around, within my soul glowed hallowed light ;  
 Forsaken ! lost ! — the Powers that reign on high  
 Claim all my life, yet death itself deny.  
 Great Spirit ! from this wildly surging main  
 Of deep despair, oh hear my cry of pain !  
 In mercy hear, while I can yet implore !  
 Send swift annihilation, or restore  
 Thy best of gifts ; all sorrow's holiest cure,—  
 The sacred power in patience to endure !

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In vain ! the dark, impenetrable stone  
 Re-echoes mockingly my piteous moan ;  
 No mercy is there — not a hope for me,  
 No light, no life, throughout eternity !  
 Since, then, the Powers of Goodness turn away,  
 Since Evil, Evil only here holds sway,  
 Wake, slumb'ring fiends of darkness ! vent your ire !  
 Bring forth your thunders — rouse the smould'ring fire !  
 Rend yon stern dome ! the rocks in seething flame  
 Melt to a sulphurous lake without a name ;

Let pitchy vapours, stagnant as the flood  
 Of which they are the offspring, hovering brood,  
 Guarding the desolation, that no ray  
 May pierce that blackest night with light of day,  
 Let lightning's glare alone those depths illumine;  
 No voice save thunder's echo through their gloom!  
 That dreary lake my sepulchre shall be,  
 That brooding night, fit monument for me!

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Whence rose that voice even now the stillness broke?  
 What unblest spirit could thus dare invoke  
 Destruction's train to bare this hideous spot,  
 And mar creation's smile with foulest blot?  
 Was thine the clamour, poor, degenerate soul,  
 On fate's wild waves a prey to rock and shoal?  
 If from the heavens thy frenzied, faithless cry  
 A moment failed to wrest a prompt reply,  
 Must thou at once from memory madly fling  
 Those stores to which it should but closer cling?  
 Wildly call up from their infernal bed,  
 Where now they rest as harmless as the dead,

The ruthless fiends who sulphurous fires sustain  
 To melt and burst thy adamant chain ?  
 Nor think'st, perchance, that even in this hour  
 Celestial ministers of heavenly power,  
 Winging their errand, pause, and loth to blame,  
 In pity veil their faces from thy shame.  
 Can I again look up with hopeful eye ?  
 Again with trustful prayer besiege the sky ?  
 Unworthy—ask reverse of fate's decree,  
 Despair's weak bondslave—claim to be made free ?

FREE!—glorious thought ! with might beyond control  
 Like eddy fire, it rushes through my soul :  
 Oh, give me but one fleeting hour to roam  
 Amidst the blest realities of home !  
 Once, once again, the magic sweet to hear  
 Of childhood pouring forth its carol clear ;  
 Once, only once, to wander with the breeze,  
 Refresh my languid eyes on waving trees ;  
 To hear above, around, the wingèd song,  
 And Zephyr's whisp'rings as he floats along ;

To rest upon some tow'ring mountain side,  
 Beneath, dark ocean's booming, billowy tide;  
 To see around Spring's beauty fresh and fair,  
 To scent wild fragrance on the buoyant air,  
 To bathe my parchèd lips in Heaven's own dew,  
 To breathe in light ! Oh, this were birth anew !  
 One hour, one moment, Mercy, grant but this !  
 For me, the lost, an age of life and bliss.

No answer on the deathlike silence breaks,  
 But in my bosom's depths a voice awakes ;  
 Gentle as music wandering with the wind,  
 Solemn as of a memory enshrined,  
 Awing the tempest, which my soul had riven,  
 To calm, as in the atmosphere of Heaven.  
 What tones are those arising now so clear,  
 Almost they seem to strike the outward ear ?  
 Yet, soft and pitying, can they come to sever  
 From hope my yearning prayer?—with mournful "*Never!*"

—"CHILD OF MORTALITY ! no, never light  
 Of sun, or moon, or star, shall bless thy sight ;

No more thy foot shall press the mountain side,  
 No more shalt thou behold the ocean's tide ;  
 Never may tender love thy pains allay,  
 Nor hope upon thy solitude shed ray.  
 For thee exists no world, will fall no tear  
 When in thy dungeon thou hast found thy bier.

“Thou murmur'st shudd'ring, and the daring thought  
 Arises in thy bosom overwrought—  
 ‘Why tyranny omnipotent should frame  
 A destiny like this ; such victims claim ?’

“Thou deem'st thyself forsaken, lost, forgot,  
 Because earth's treasures fill no more thy lot ;  
 Seest but a tyrant will, a careless hand,  
 In that Almighty force which wields command.  
 Wilt thou, then, fathom with a mortal's thought  
 The Mind which through eternity has wrought ?  
 Or, from thy molehill peering, scan the Power  
 Whose glorious pleasure it has been to dower  
 With teeming life th' illimitable space  
 Of thronèd Chaos once the dwelling-place ?

Think'st thou that He—Upholder of all spheres,  
 Whose care in humblest worm alike appears,—  
 Who gifts the very herbage 'neath man's feet  
 With beauty delicate and odour sweet,—  
 And to the insect fluttering in the beam  
 Accords its hour of joy from life's warm stream,  
 Think'st thou that He—Great Source whence all things  
 Would whelm in fruitless sorrow aught below?     [flow,  
 Then dare no more to question the decree  
 Omnipotent to bind or to make free;  
 Thou seest an atom's space, a moment's span—  
 He,—the beginning and the end of Man.

“ Poor weakling ! mourn no more thy kindred clay :  
 Beauty and brightness,—worlds must pass away ;  
 The sun go down to everlasting night,  
 The moon, the stars, resign their feebler light ;  
 The hoary mountains sink, and be no more,  
 Vast ocean ebb for ever from its shore ;  
 All these to nothingness must fade away,  
 For they, like thee, are creatures of a day.

Thou ask'st if thus must vanish, as a dream,  
A universe in deep oblivion's stream,  
Why should eternal Power from Chaos call  
Worlds which so soon again to Chaos fall ?  
Blind mortal ! think'st thou naught would then remain  
To prove supreme Almighty Wisdom's reign ?  
Because all perishes from ear and eye  
Is nothing left of fixed reality ?  
Learn that of Truth's immortal flame no spark  
E'er passed away without enduring mark ;  
Of Love's exhaustless fount no drop distilled,  
Through hearts by tenderness or pity thrilled,  
Has ever failed to join that living stream  
Eternity unites with Time's sad dream.  
These are the real—these are of the sky ;  
All that is born of earth—with earth must die.

“Then cease regrets, and raise thine eyes to Heaven ;—  
Nay, tremble not, poor sufferer,—'tis forgiven !  
No longer mourn a world where doubt and sin  
Veil all things worthy of the soul to win ;

Upwards and onwards let thy spirit range,  
Nor weakly grieve where 'tis not thine to change.  
But if, until thy mortal course be run,  
Unswerving faith be never fully won,—  
If, crushed 'neath solitude, the torture-smart  
Of cureless woe still fasten on thy heart,—  
If scenes of perished joy uncalled arise,  
To mock thy desolate spirit's agonies,—  
Then steadfast be thy gaze; remember, still,  
These are but shadows in their good or ill;  
The light, now hidden from thy craving sense,  
But pale reflexion of a light intense;  
The love still clinging to thy lonely heart,  
Of love's infinity but shadowy part;  
The joy, which through thy spirit to the last  
Will vibrate tremulous memories of the past,  
Far less than echo from that distant shore  
Whence tones of bliss ascend for evermore.  
There shall thy spirit find that light long sought  
Amidst the cloudy realms of mortal thought;  
There breathe that atmosphere of perfect love  
Yearned for in vain till it has soared above;

There find enthroned in majesty divine,  
 Love, beauty, power, in harmony combine :  
 There, freed for ever, when thy course is done,  
 CHILD OF ETERNITY ! thy home is won."

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'Tis gone ! that voice more tender in its tone  
 Than mother's hushing soft her infant's moan,  
 Yet sweeping thickest darkness from the mind  
 As clouds are scattered by the mighty wind.  
 Lost mortal treasures ! never more shall ye  
 Rise, spectral, to eclipse my destiny !  
 No more within my writhing heart shall dwell  
 The long, dark agony of lone farewell ;  
 E-7'n Love itself I would not here reclaim,  
 Till Heaven once more relume its hallowed flame ;  
 Never again my spirit shall rebel—  
 Burst are thy fetters, Earth—and broke thy spell !

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Oh, wondrous sight ! . O'er thee, my cherished stream,  
 A silvery glimmer steals like faint moonbeam,

Through the dark distance all unknown to day  
 I see thee hither wind thy glittering way.  
 No more of sad farewells I read the trace,  
 A thousand smiles now sparkle on thy face,  
 No more thy broken murmurs to mine ear  
 The sobbing sighs of parting grief appear,  
 More like the tones of gladness half repress,  
 Which welcome long-lost joy to some lone breast.

But comes that beam from thee? Mysterious awe  
 Steals o'er my soul—amazed, I see withdraw  
 The everlasting curtain of black night;  
 My dungeon opens;—can it be? 'Tis Light!  
 Or is it vision of a fevered brain?  
 Does hope yet mock me with delusion vain?  
 No! still increasing, distance gives to view  
 In growing clearness wondrous objects new;  
 Pillar o'er pillar rising, arch o'er arch,  
 Extends the vista in majestic march;  
 The massive walls, the vast primeval dome,  
 The giant dwellers in this dismal home,—

All that successive ages left in night,  
Behold them now in panoply of light !

Hush ! floating from the distance—closer—here—  
Enchanting melody assails mine ear,  
Now low, like wordless breathings from above  
Of spirits wooing to immortal love ;—  
Now swelling to a harmony divine,  
Like rapturous praise before a heavenly shrine ;—  
It seizes on my soul—celestial fire  
The mortal kindles to sublime desire.  
What means this ecstasy that checks the breath—  
This painless struggle ? is it birth, or death ?  
I faint ; I sink ; while on the tide of sound  
Buoyed up, I scarcely touch the glistening ground.  
Are ye, then, past—Earth, Time ? Is victory won ?  
Th' immortal free ? Eternity begun ?  
Farewell for ever, realms of pain and night :—  
Hail ! reached at last, supreme, eternal LIGHT !

THE END.



